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# WEST POINT

AND

# THE WAR.

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DEDICATED BY A WESTERN OFFICER TO HIS EASTERN FELLOW-SOLDIERS.

ST. LOUIS, MO., MARCH, 1863.

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## I.

### THE WAR.

When President LINCOLN issued his first call for 75,000 men, we read in the newspapers that the announcement of this Proclamation was received by the rebel Congress—then sitting at Montgomery—with shouts of laughter. Our indignation was justifiable at the time, but experience soon taught us that we had underrated the strength, harmonious unity and resources of the South, and we now admit that they had reason to smile at the pigmy army of 75,000 men, with which we proposed to enforce the laws of the United States. After discovering our mistake, a gigantic and patriotic North has, for the last two years, poured out its wealth, men and immense resources, at the many-headed Dragon; and we are to-day, to all practical purposes, no nearer the re-establishment of the Union than when it first broke asunder. True, we are in possession of more Southern soil than we could boast of two years ago, but the armies and defenses of our enemy are as strong and seemingly impregnable as ever, and our conquests have merely increased the already enormous expenses of transportation and subsistence, without any adequate benefit whatsoever.

Obedience and discipline are the paramount duties of a soldier, without which an army is but a powerless mob. The Volunteers of the United States can boast of having practiced these military virtues in a degree never before witnessed in the world. It is a historical fact that the armies of the old world owed their existence to a despotic rule, that reduced the soldiery to a mere machinery of brutal force that had no voice in the destinies of their respective nations, and to whom patriotism meant nothing but military vain-glory. But the soldiery of the United States is entirely differently constituted.

Our armies originated, not because our ruling powers so wanted it, but because our rulers knew that the people so wanted it, and our armies are the people itself, and every soldier is a voting citizen. They fight, not to advance military glory, nor to be the machinery of an artful diplomacy of whose designs they know nothing, but they fight for their own self-preservation, for their liberty and their homes, well knowing that the success of the Southern rebellion would imperil these treasures beyond redemption.

Hence it is proper — nay, even a sacred duty of the Volunteer — to combine military discipline and obedience with an intelligent knowledge of the condition of national affairs, and linked together with the military operations as these are, he is bound to take notice of the manner in which these have been conducted. And if in exercising a sound criticism in this regard, he finds from deductions and *experience* that mismanagement and stupidity have characterized all military movements so far, and that the objects of this war are as distant from their realization as ever, it is proper for the Volunteer to enquire into the causes of this mismanagement, and to use all his civil influence, through his friends at home and his representatives in legislative halls, to correct existing evils and put a stop to the continuous experimenting blunders.

## II.

### WEST POINT.

The armies of the East have but little connection with those of the West. We hear of the exploits of each other through the newspapers and official reports, but beyond this we have as yet no means of exchanging ideas and ascertaining the feelings and impressions in each. Being familiar with the ruling sentiments in the Western armies — with which I have been identified ever since the outbreak of the war — I send these lines to our fellow-soldiers in the East in order to give an expression to the views held here as to the causes of our slow progress; and if the same are felt to be true by our com-

rades there, we ask their hearty co-operation in effecting the necessary changes. If we are wrong in our views, let us know where the blame is, and we will cheerfully aid in uprooting the evil wherever it may be.

I only express an opinion generally held by all officers who have had occasion to judge from experience, and whose participation in this war was actuated by pure patriotism, when I state, that the principal cause of all our disappointments and delays can be distinctly traced to the influence of incompetent or designing superior officers, whose only claims for the position they occupy are derived from their accidental military education at West Point. A military education is a great advantage, and if the tuition received at West Point falls in good ground, it will develop a commander who is entitled to the preference in the government of military matters, and we all must cheerfully submit to his preferment to the most responsible positions. But an education at West Point does not make a genius out of a dunce, nor does it create intelligence out of stupidity. This rule holds good in all classes of educational institutes. The study of theology does not of itself make the student an efficient minister, nor does the study of philosophy make him a philosopher. Science is one thing and the application of it quite another. But, aside from these general truths, there are some special reasons why the pretentions of a West Point graduate at the present time appear plainly preposterous. Let us limit ourselves to facts. The regular officers of the present day, with the exception of some from the older classes, have had very limited opportunities of gaining practical experience in military matters. Leaving West Point, they have generally been assigned to duty on the frontiers and at the forts, where the commands seldom exceeded a few companies. Years have passed over their heads in the outskirts of civilization, their sphere of action being limited to the exercise of a monotonous routine. They have been estranged from any part or participation in the great national questions controling our destinies, and, from

their peculiar education, have always and will always look down upon our civil government and institutions as a necessary evil at best. Moving from station to station, their lives have generally been so unsettled, that but very few of them have formed social ties, and there has been nothing to attach them to the people from whence they sprung, except pleasures and gratification of military pride. At the bombardment of Fort Sumter, they were suddenly called upon to take a stand either for or against the country that educated them, and those that were actuated only by ambition for military honor and preferment, turned their faces to the South, for there was reason to believe, for a while, that its experienced statesmen, and great wealth, combined with their political power in the North, would result in a speedy victory over and subjugation of the North, and the distribution of military honors are with the victors. Thus we lost the most energetic and daring (because ambitious) of our officers, and the rest remained true to our flag—some from pure patriotism and convictions, others from accidental indifference, others from want of courage and decision at the proper moment and afterwards awed by the enthusiasm that possessed the rising people.

It was proper that those that remained true to the Union, should occupy prominent positions in the great armies then organizing. But it was equally proper that after the active campaigns and military operations had brought the respective qualifications to a practical test, nothing but demonstrated merit or ability should entitle any soldier whatsoever, to preferment or increase his military authority. But here is the evil of which we complain, here is the source of our delays and disasters. It can be clearly demonstrated, that the government of all our military affairs has been persistently entrusted to men, who had no other claims to their position, than the accidental fact of having graduated at West Point, without having shown by practical experience any of those great qualifications, which alone should entitle them to the control.

The nation rose as a man, men and means, and unlimited resources were at the disposal of the Government. All the nation asked in return was: bring this war to a speedy close, crush the rebellion with boldness; our life as a nation is at stake; strike! and if you fail, call on us again; drain us to our last life-drop, but strike!

But what is the practical answer: preparations and delay. Our principal military commanders had a great deal to do with long preparations; forgetting that while we gathered strength in organizing and drilling, we gave our enemies the same opportunities. And why should our West Point officer be in a hurry about finishing the war? Why should he be in a hurry to this very day? As stated above, he has no particular respect for our peaceful persuits as industrious citizens. He is not identified with our civil government. He has no family that calls him back into their arms when the war is over. He is now occupying a prominent military position that ceases with the war, and the General to-day would in such an event, have to relinquish his glory and pay, and retire to his insignificant Lieutenantcy or Captainship in the regular army, when peace is established. With the exception of a few that are actuated by a pure patriotism, there is not a single consideration or motive that generally actuate men, namely, ambition or egotism, that would influence most of our regular officers in desiring an early termination of this war, and to these our destinies to be solved with the sword are entrusted.

## III.

### HALLECK.

It must be apparent to every close observer, in reflecting on the events of the last year, that a wonderfully pernicious and tenacious effort has been made, in a secret and silent way, to fill every important position in our military departments with graduates from West Point. It has been done with a perfect success, and every branch of the military organization is now controlled by such. If merit or tried ability had been the

guiding qualifications for such positions, nobody would find fault; but it is clearly that such qualifications are entirely secondary to the mere accidental fact of being a West Point graduate.

There is hardly any doubt but that this effort is the result of a premeditated plan, long ago adopted by the prominent officers of the regular army. Their great spokesman and hero is now the General-in-chief of all the armies; and if I find occasion to concentrate my succeeding remarks on General Halleck, it is not because he is deficient in ability or merit in his proper sphere, but because he is the personification and advocate of all those military pretensions that are simply based on military education.

We of the West have had no opportunity of forming any distinct opinion of the merits of the Generals in the East, nor have our fellow-soldiers in the East had any intimate acquaintance with our Western commanders. But General Halleck is known to all of us, and it is therefore proper to examine his career, especially as he is *the* representative of the officers of the regular army.

Halleck superceded Fremont in the Western Department. Order had to be established out of chaos, and with his excellent administrative talent he went to work and systematized his enormous command. Being an able engineer, he will never fail to be a very effective officer in any branch of the military departments where it depends on regulating or organizing the complicated machinery of the military theatre. But as a General in the field, he will always prove a failure. As long as he remained stationary in St. Louis, distributing his armies and providing them with everything requisite, and left his Generals in the field to select their own opportunities for fighting, his administration was a success. But it is a well-known fact that the victories at Fort Donelson, Fort Henry and Pea Ridge, came entirely unawares on Halleck — premature to all of his calculations. He then left St. Louis and took the field. The enemy was collected at Corinth, and as a true

Engineer, Halleck went to digging, and was going to Corinth by gradual approaches. Beauregard, to satisfy himself of Halleck's intentions, attempted at different times to draw our armies out in open battle, but of no avail. Satisfied of Halleck's plans, which lay open to his eyes, Beauregard evacuated the place, and Halleck's operations in the field were at an end. He was then called to the more important command, as Chief of all the Armies of the United States. A borrowed glory followed him; but when, after the fight at Fredericksburg, we saw him come out over his own signature, and disavow any knowledge whatever of the plans or movements of that campaign, we asked ourselves, What position does Halleck really occupy? He commands no army. He knows nothing of the plans of the campaign on the Potomac. It does seem that he occupies a very comfortable position, in which he means to reap the glory that any lucky General may gain, and to be perfectly innocent of any disasters that may happen.

I challenge an answer to the following questions:

1st. Where is the man amongst all the superior officers from the regular army (with the exception of Rosecrans) who, during the campaigns of the last two years, has shown any degree of superior military genius? Who can point out the man that has signalized himself by the planning and able execution of stragetic movements, thus displaying the pretended benefit of his scientific military education? Where is the man who has displayed that quick energy, that dashes at the proper moment at an unsuspecting enemy and strikes torror in his midst? I say, where are the officers of the regular army who in any of these respects have surpassed, nay, even equalled the feats of our most prominent volunteer officers, and what has any regular officer done that any volunteer of common sense could not have done as well, if not better?

2nd. Have you ever yet seen a regiment, brigade, division or army, commanded by an officer of the regular army, that in drill, discipline or effectiveness, surpassed any equal command

of a volunteer officer? And if not, of what practical utility has then the privileged education been, and why should it entitle the recipient to any preference over volunteer officers?

3rd. Have you ever met with an officer of the regular army, whose heart and soul seemed imbued with the one sublime purpose of pushing ahead and crushing the rebellion as speedily as possible? If you have met such, their numbers are easily counted; but have you not found, as a general thing, that the majority of those officers are remarkably fond of an easy life, fond of the pleasures of the city, laying back on the dignity of their position, and checking all energetic plans of their subalterns?

4th. Can you explain why such a large proportion of the regular officers are continually assigned to duty in the Northern States, on recruiting service, and as officers of the Commissary and Quartermaster's Departments, and why they are so tenaciously holding on to the same the larger and more responsible the post is? Why is this done, when most of these positions could be easily filled by practical responsible business men from civil life, whilst the regular officer, who received his military education at the public expense, might be properly occupied in establishing camps of instruction and *impart* their superior knowledge to schools of volunteer officers? Would this not be their proper sphere even if they felt any disinclination for taking part in the active campaign?

5th. Why is it, then, that the administration of all military departments are so entirely controlled by men whom the experience of two long and eventful years has proven to be deficient in those higher qualifications that are absolutely requisite to the solution of the great national problem? Or are we like the Bourbons, always to learn and never to repent and get wise?

6th. By what secret influence does Halleck continue to exercise the control of military affairs, when it is well known that the best informed men in Washington, inside and outside

of Congress, are strongly opposed to him, and not a proof can be given of any distinguished qualifications, except the partiality for officers of the regular army, to retain him as commander-in-chief?

It is unnecessary to cite names and instances. They are within the reach of every officer of all armies. I shall only mention, as an illustration of numerous cases, that the Senate lately refused to confirm General Wright, commanding the Department of the Ohio, as Major-General, "because his only claims to this preferment arose from the fact that he is an old friend and admirer of Halleck's." And yet General Wright has commanded that Department for more than six months, having been suddenly made a Major-General, and elevated from obscurity for the occasion.

## IV.

### CONCLUSION.

The civil political dissensions in the North will never endanger the existence of the Union. They are merely the natural effects of the unsatisfactory manner in which the affairs of the nation have been managed for the last year. Remove these damaging causes — let the military departments be controlled by men whose merits consist in their proven ability and patriotism, no matter whether they have had a West Point, a Cambridge, or a common school education, and life and energy displayed by our rulers will arouse the fading patriotism and make a unit of the nation. All it craves is progress and life. But as long as our military movements are governed by lukewarm men, who care more for castes and partizanship than for the welfare of a free people, so long will our war remain as it has been hitherto, a series of "strategic" experiments, and our end will be ruin.

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